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(54) **COMPENSATING RETAINING MEMBER FOR USE WITH A MOLDING SYSTEM**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **425/572**; 249/178; 425/190; 425/192 R; 425/577

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 425/572, 425/577, 190, 192 R; 249/178, 179, 183
See application file for complete search history.

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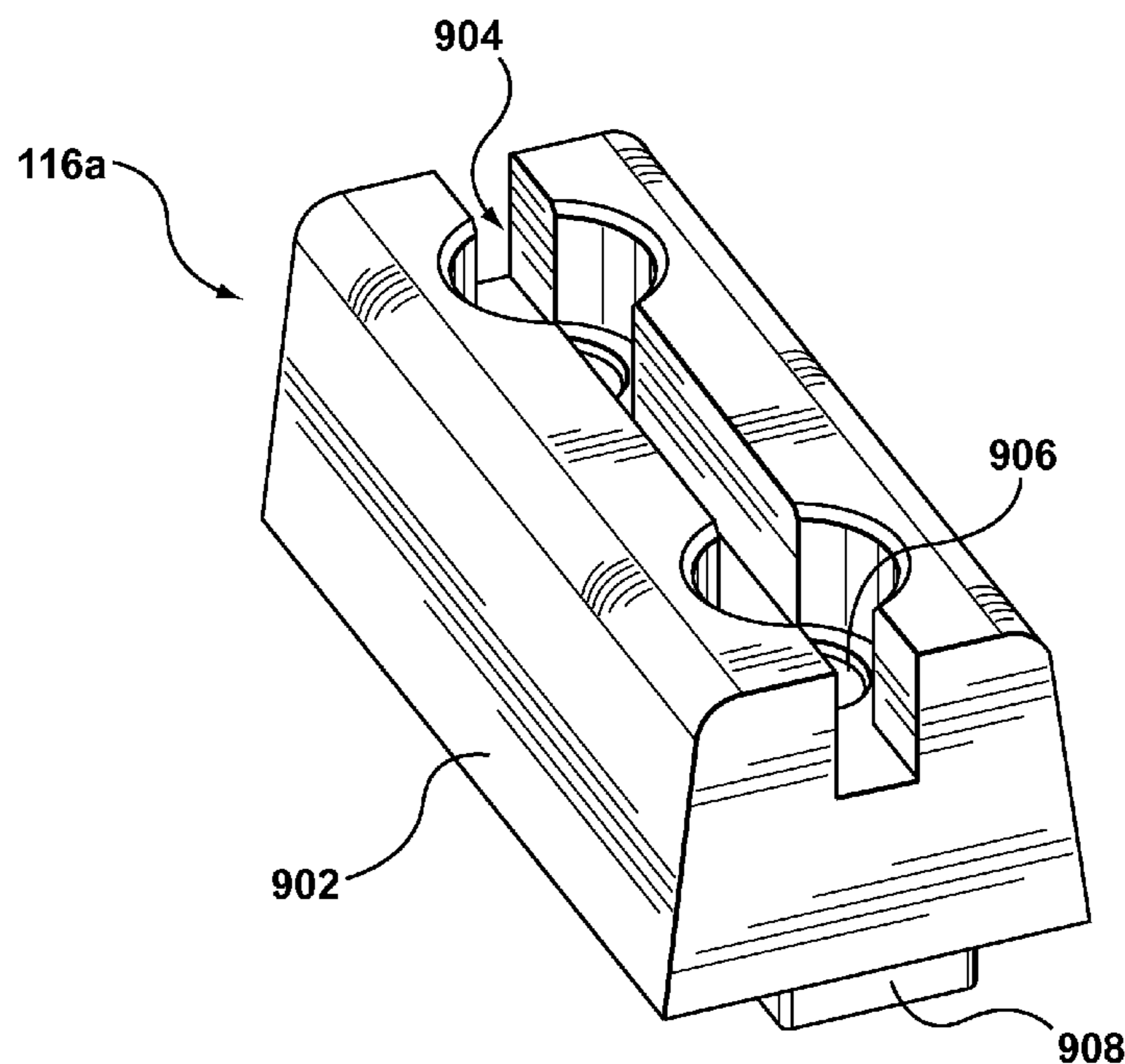
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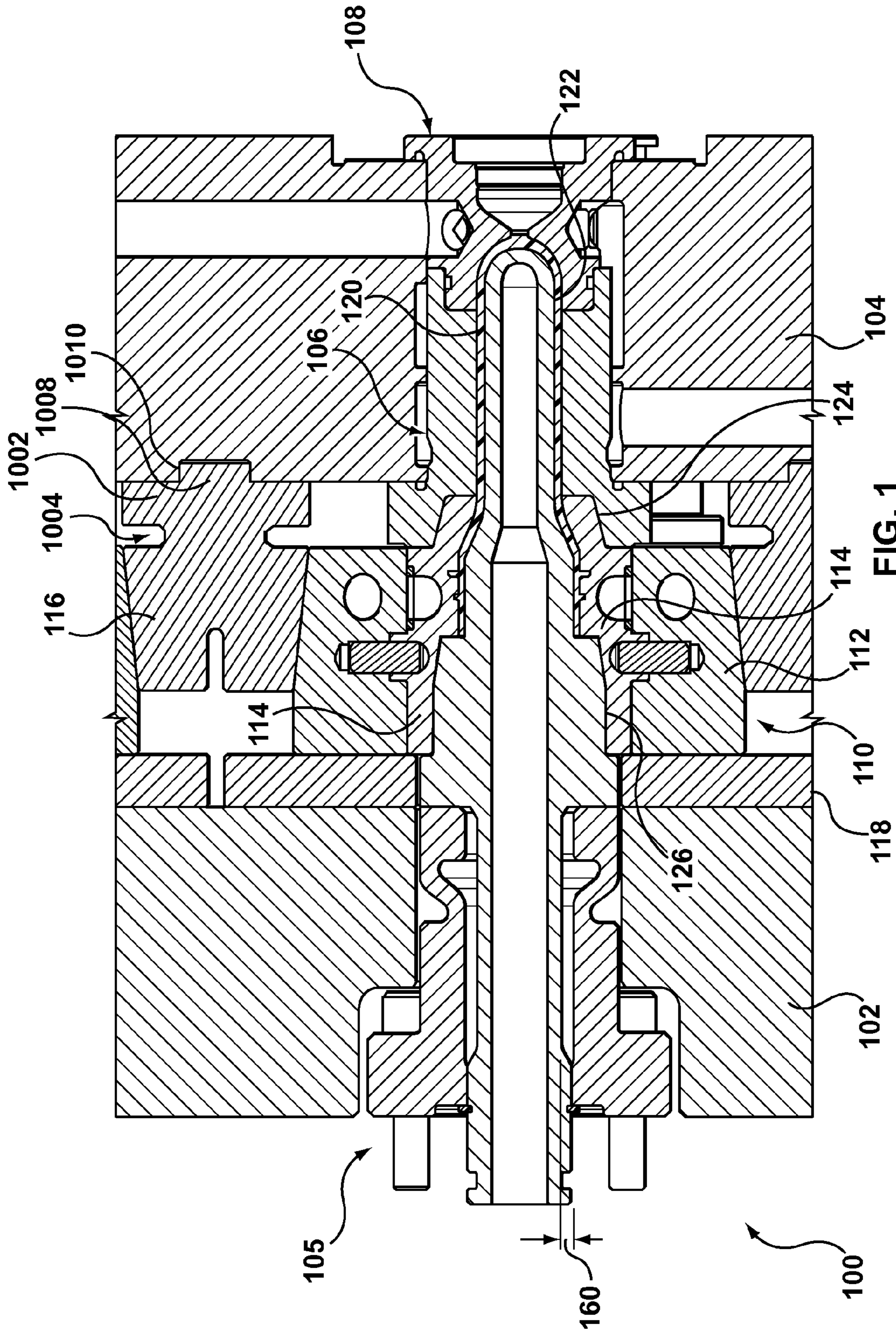
Primary Examiner—Tim Heitbrink

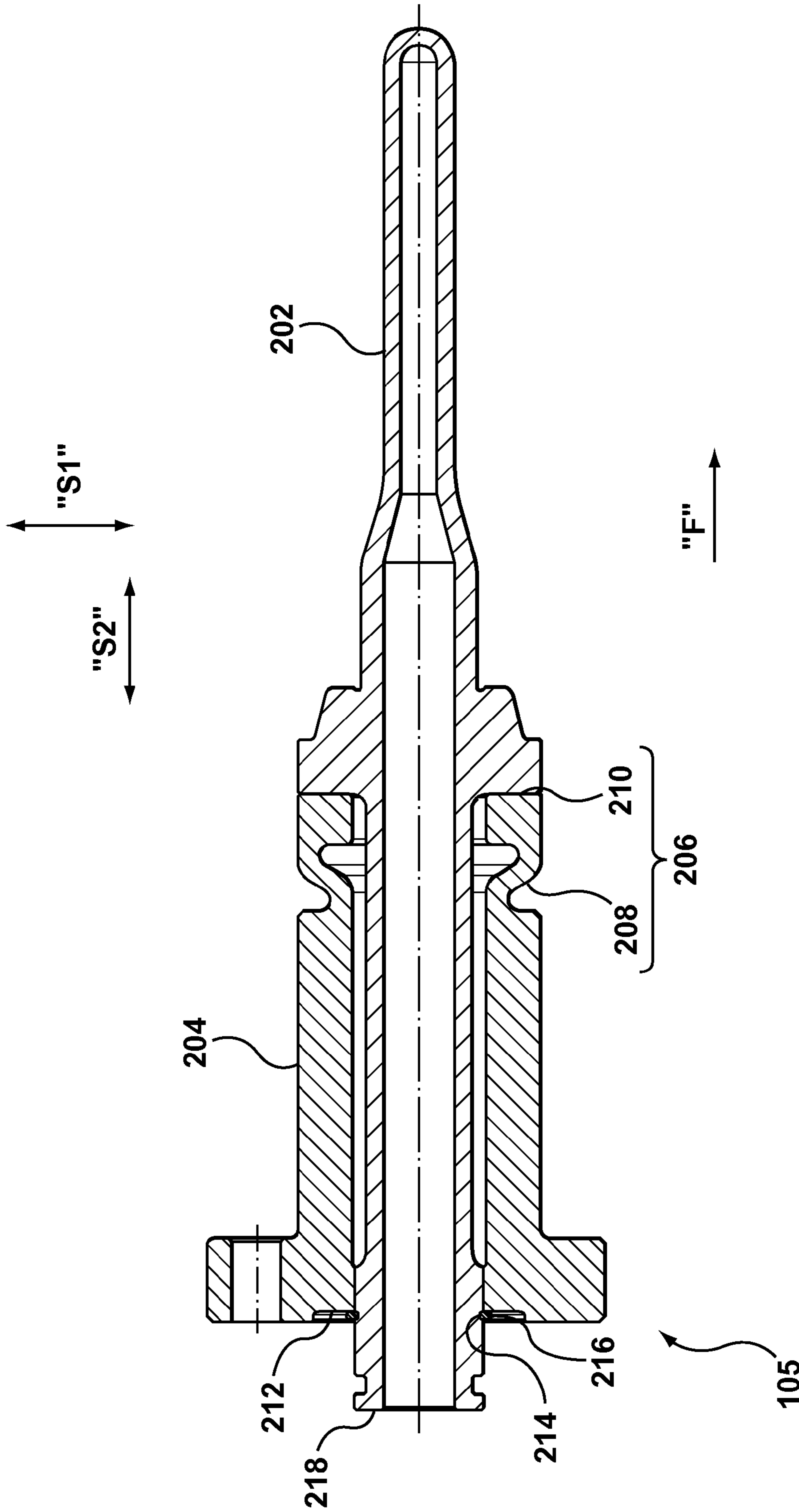
(57) **ABSTRACT**

Disclosed are a compensating retaining member for use with a molding system and the molding system incorporating same. A retaining structure for use in a molding system, the retaining structure configured to cooperate with a slide that is configured to receive, in use, a split mold insert coupled to the slide, is provided. The retaining structure comprises a body defining a relief element configured to provide a degree of flexibility to the body.

16 Claims, 14 Drawing Sheets







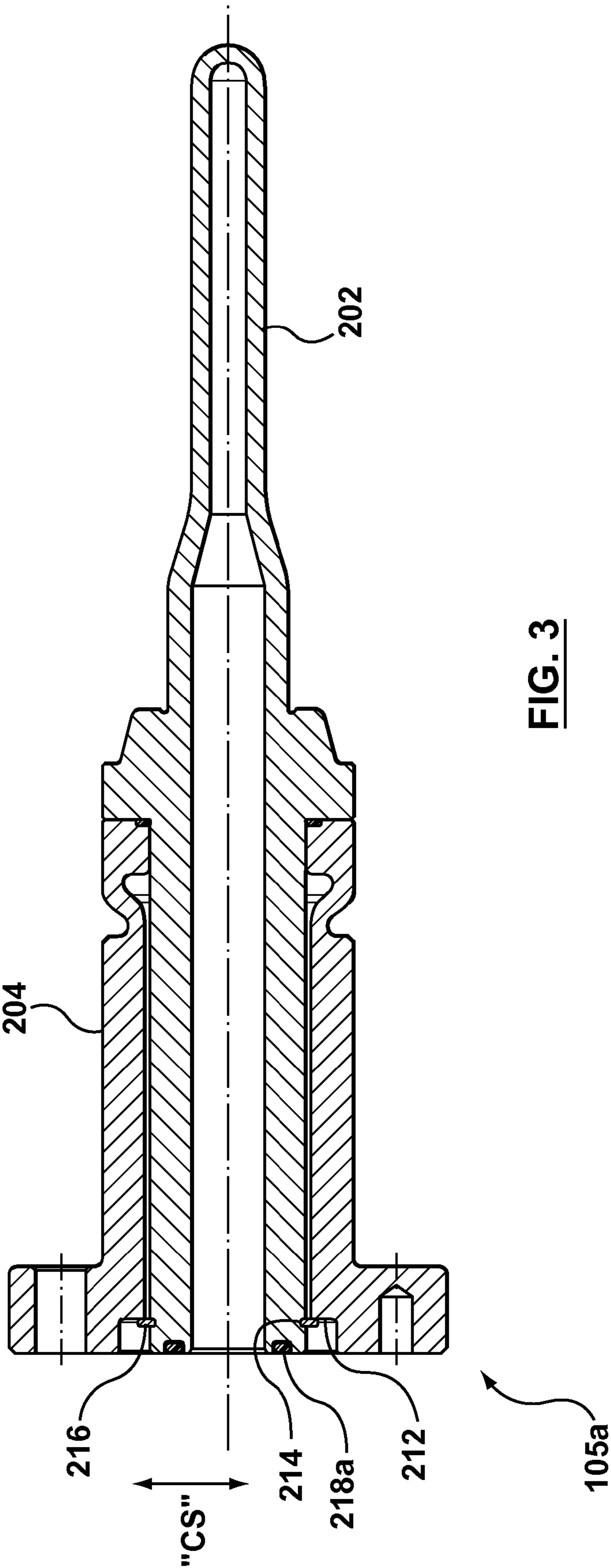


FIG. 3

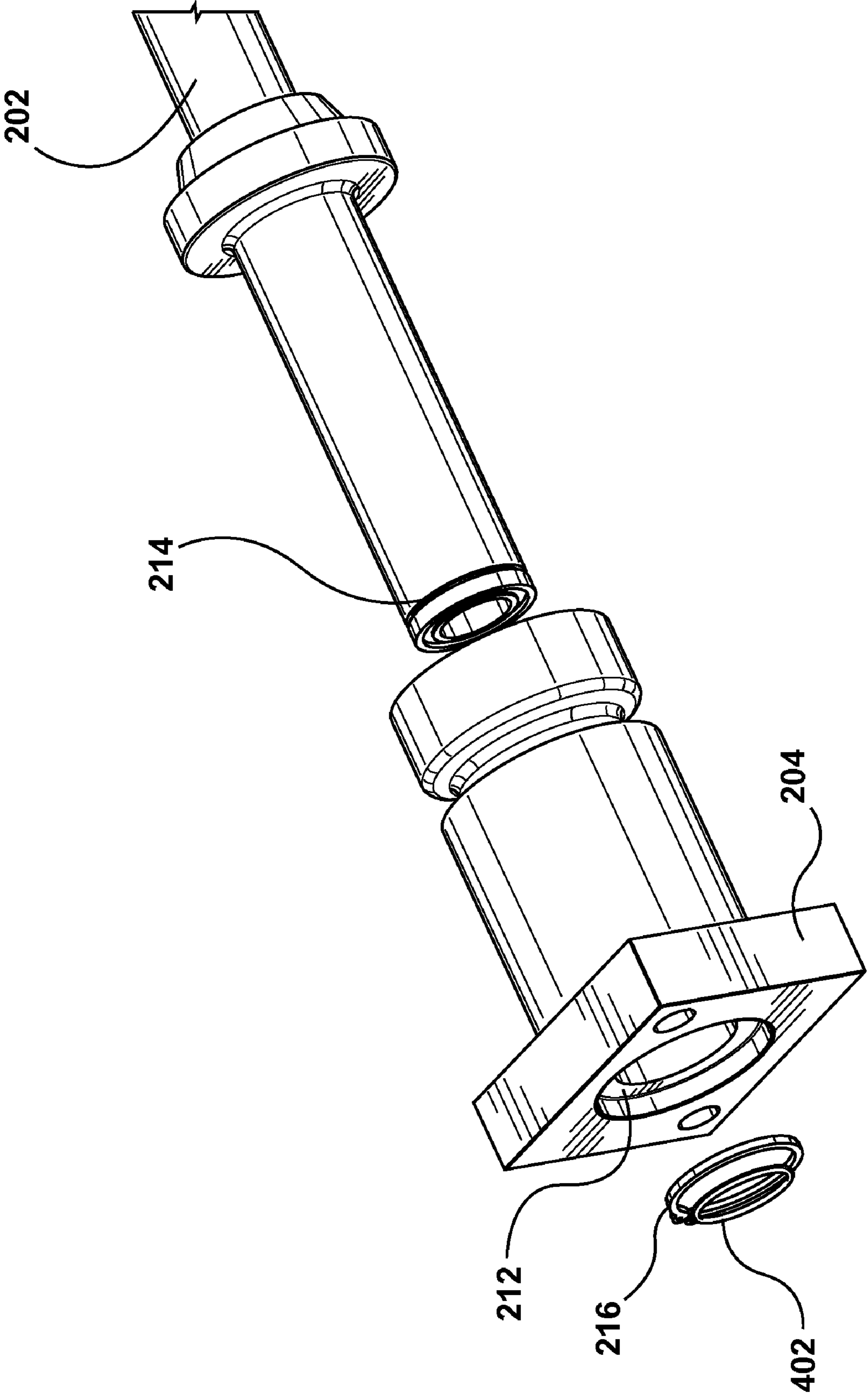


FIG. 4

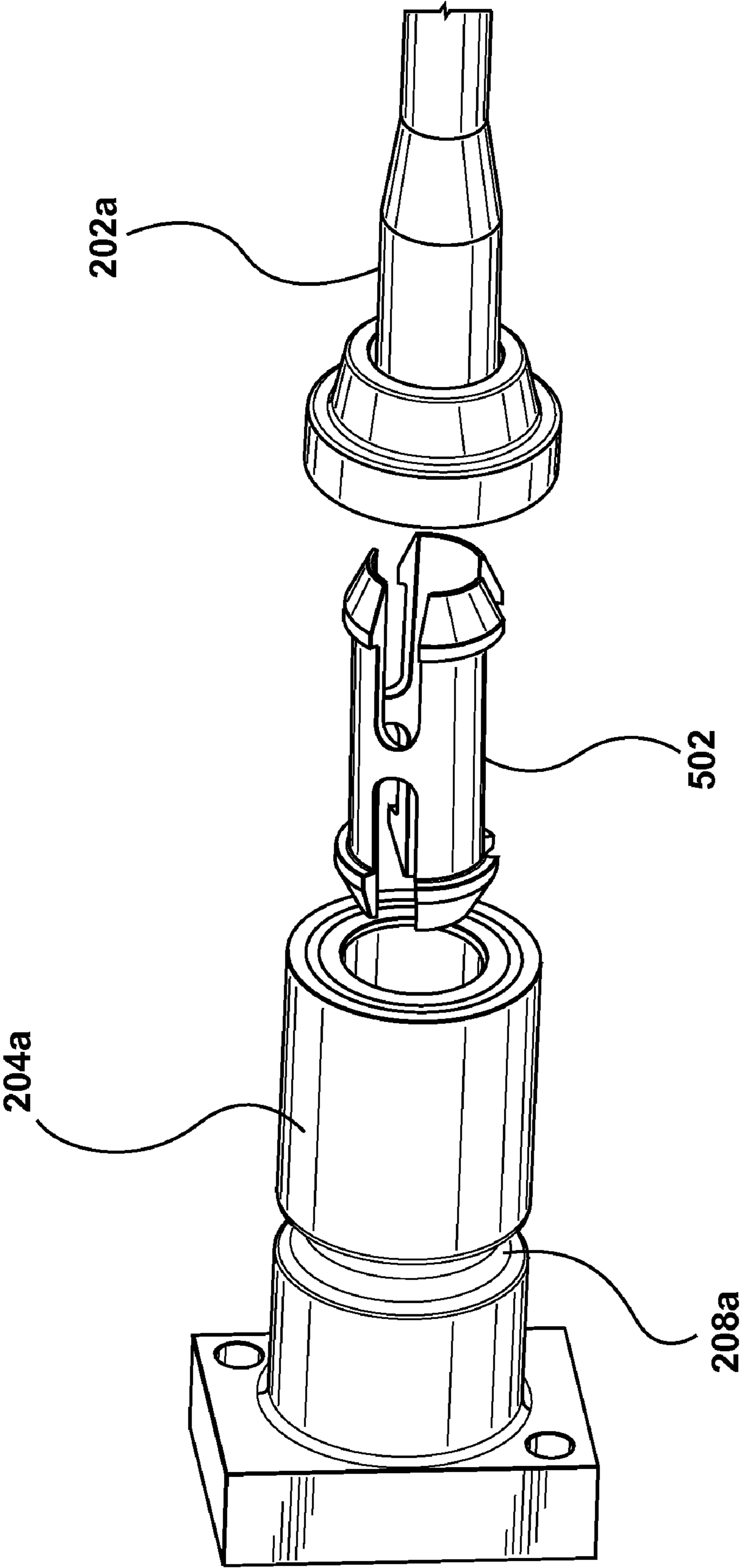


FIG. 5

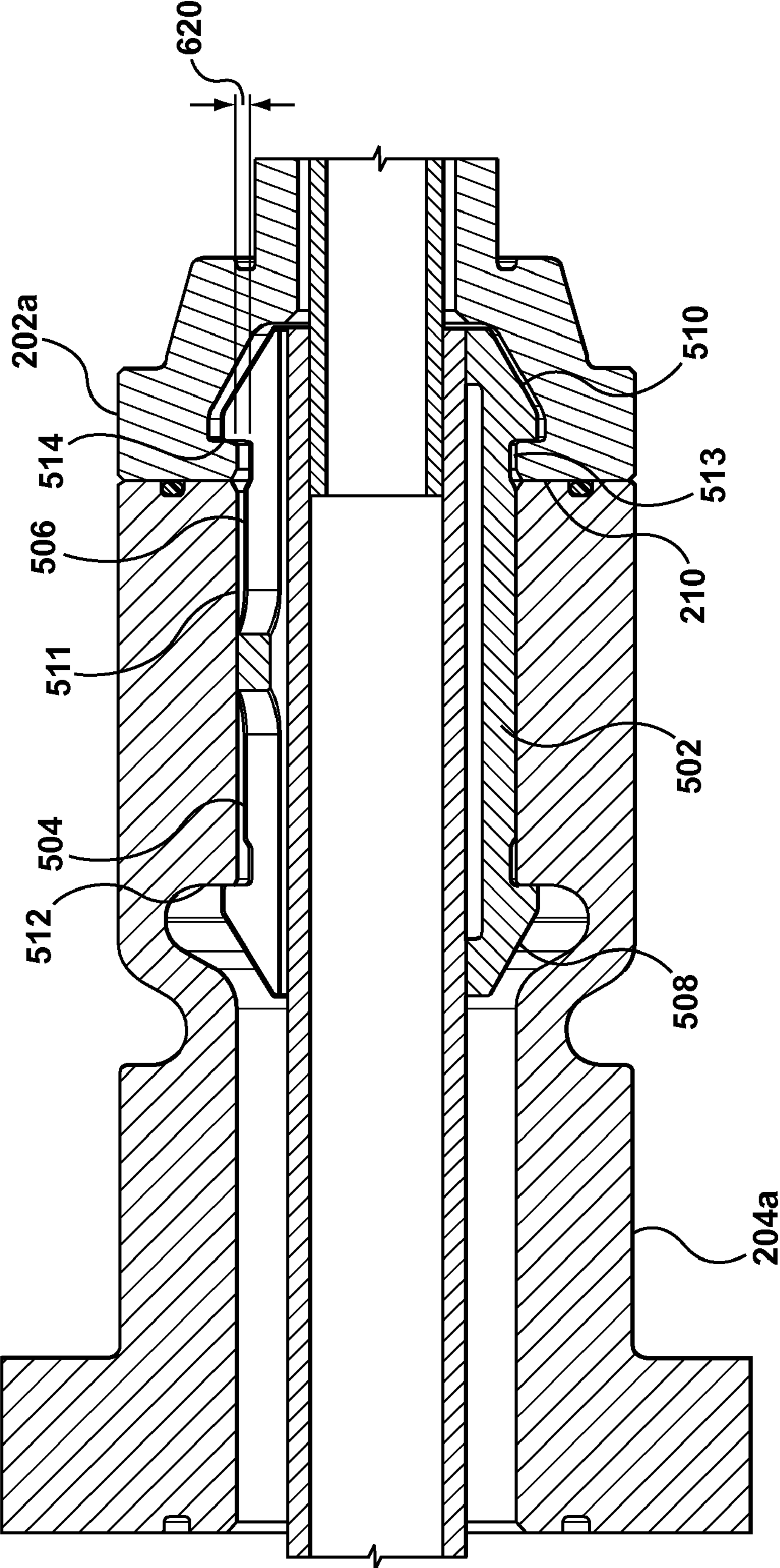


FIG. 6

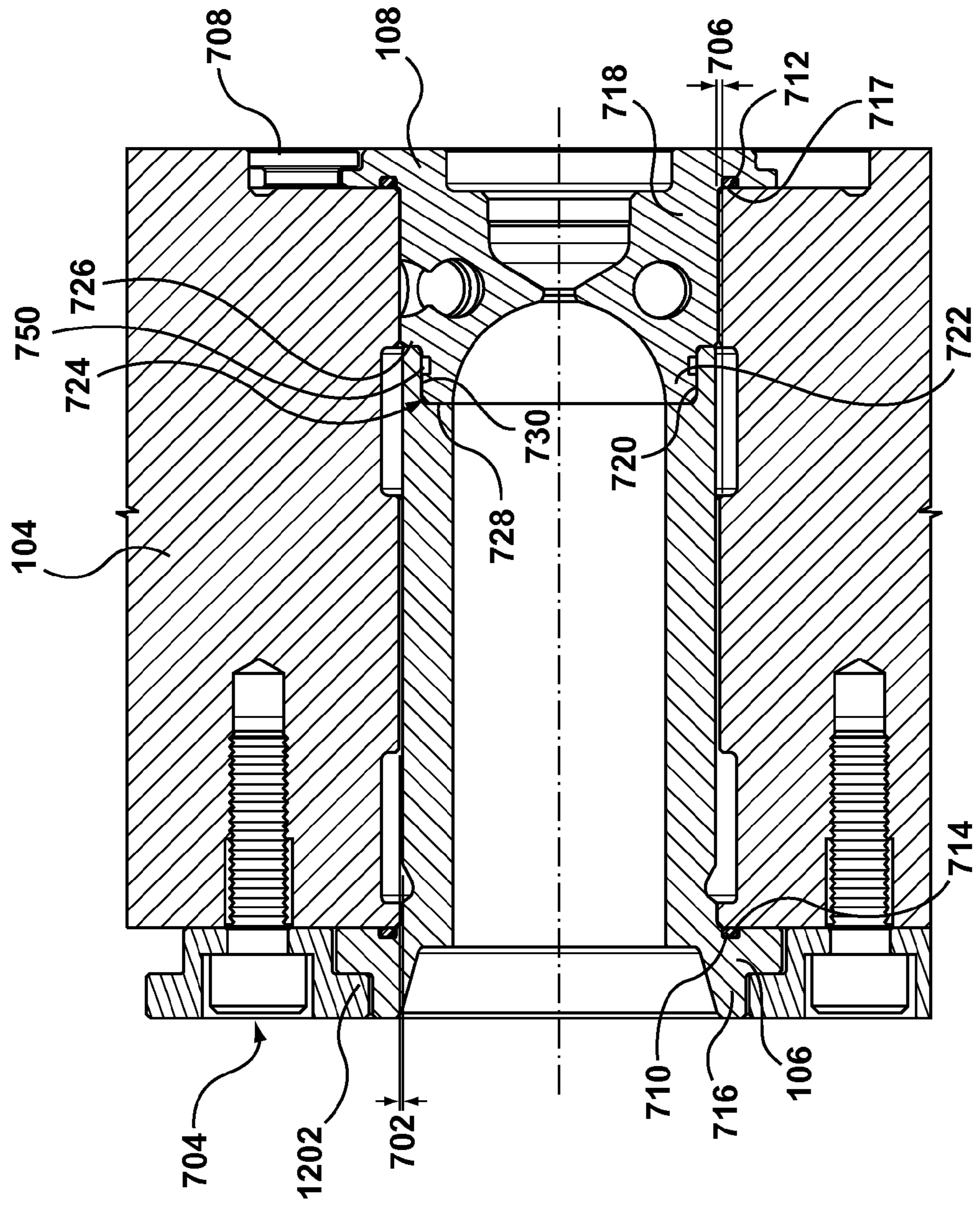


FIG. 7

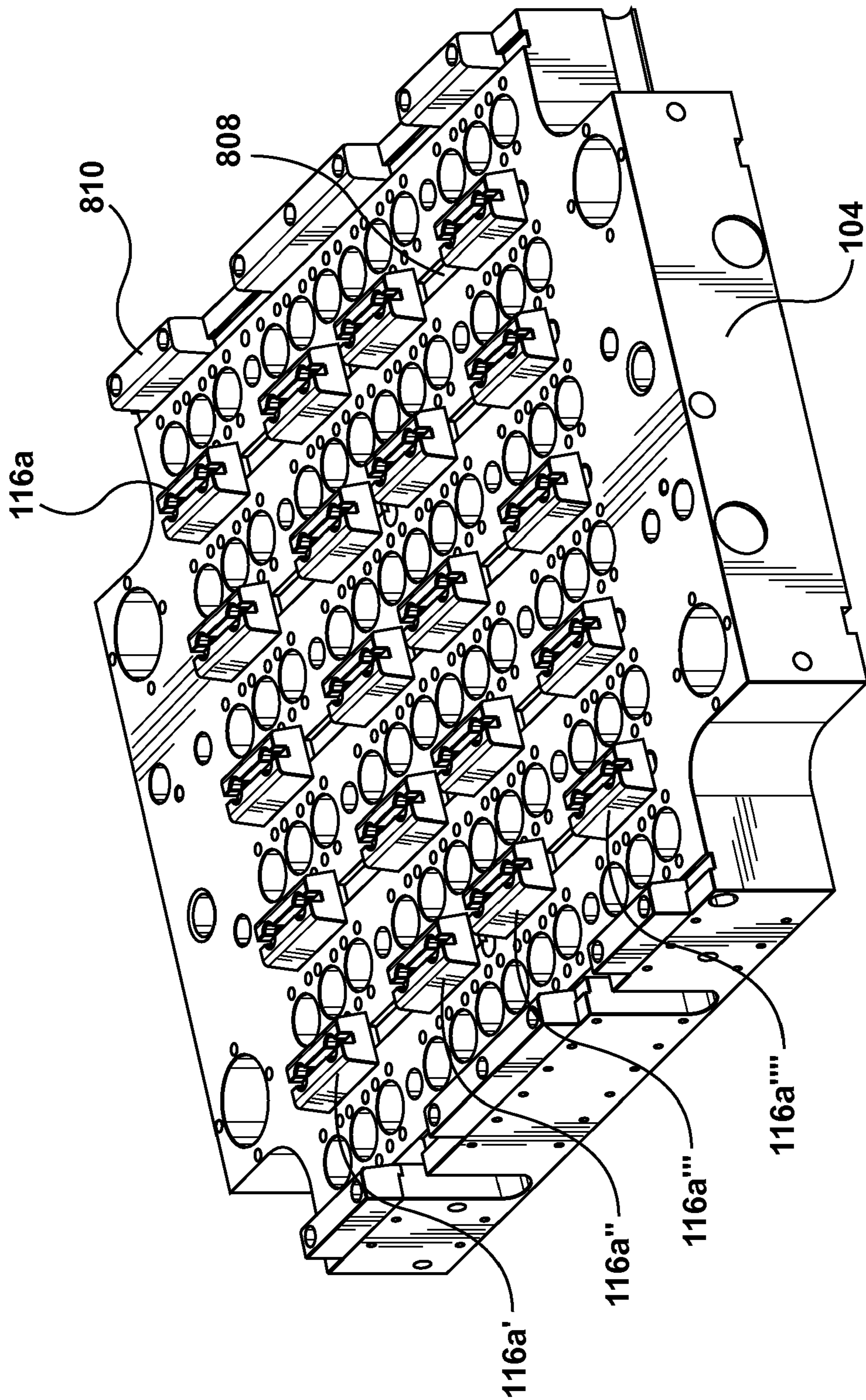


FIG. 8

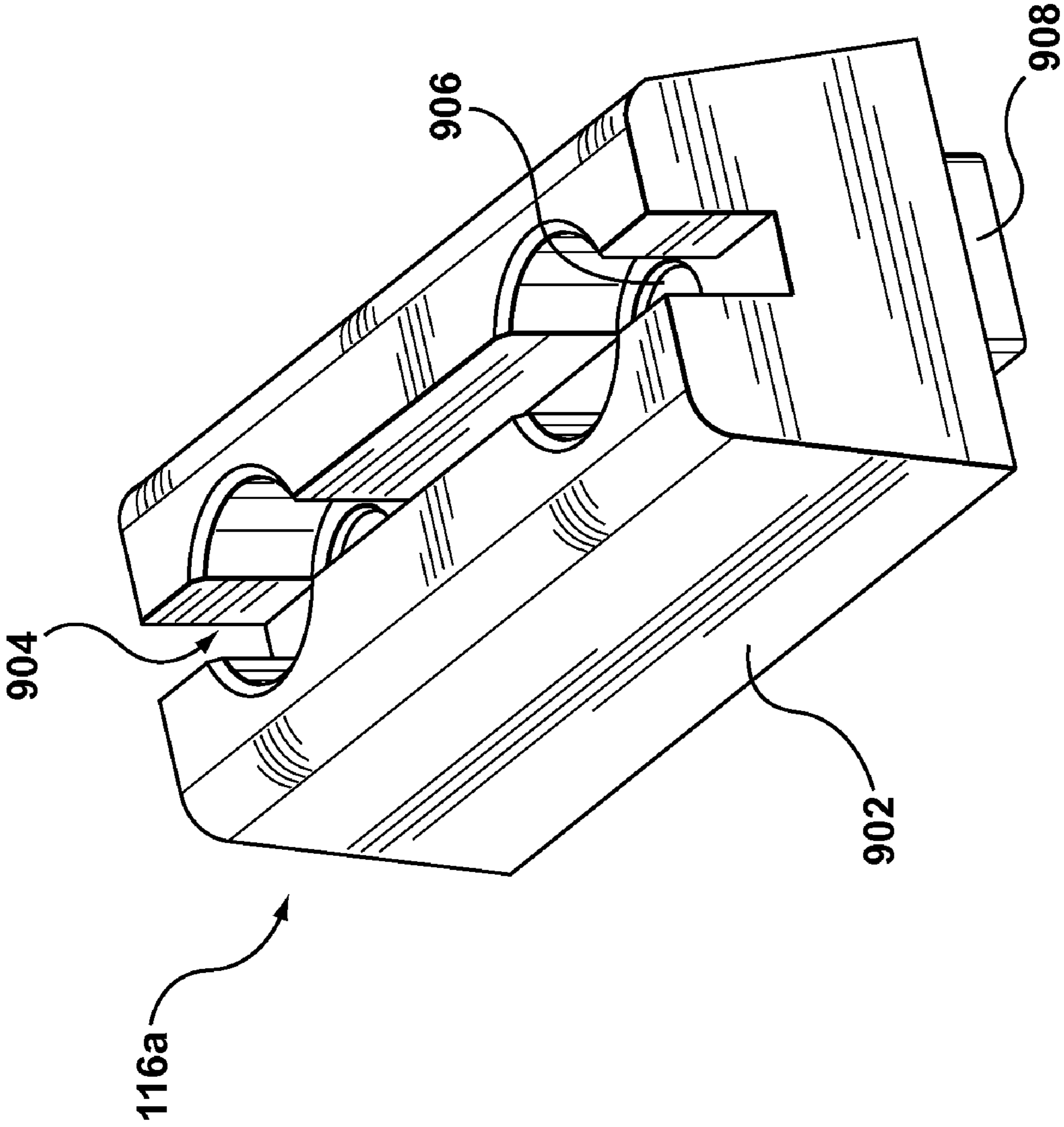


FIG. 9

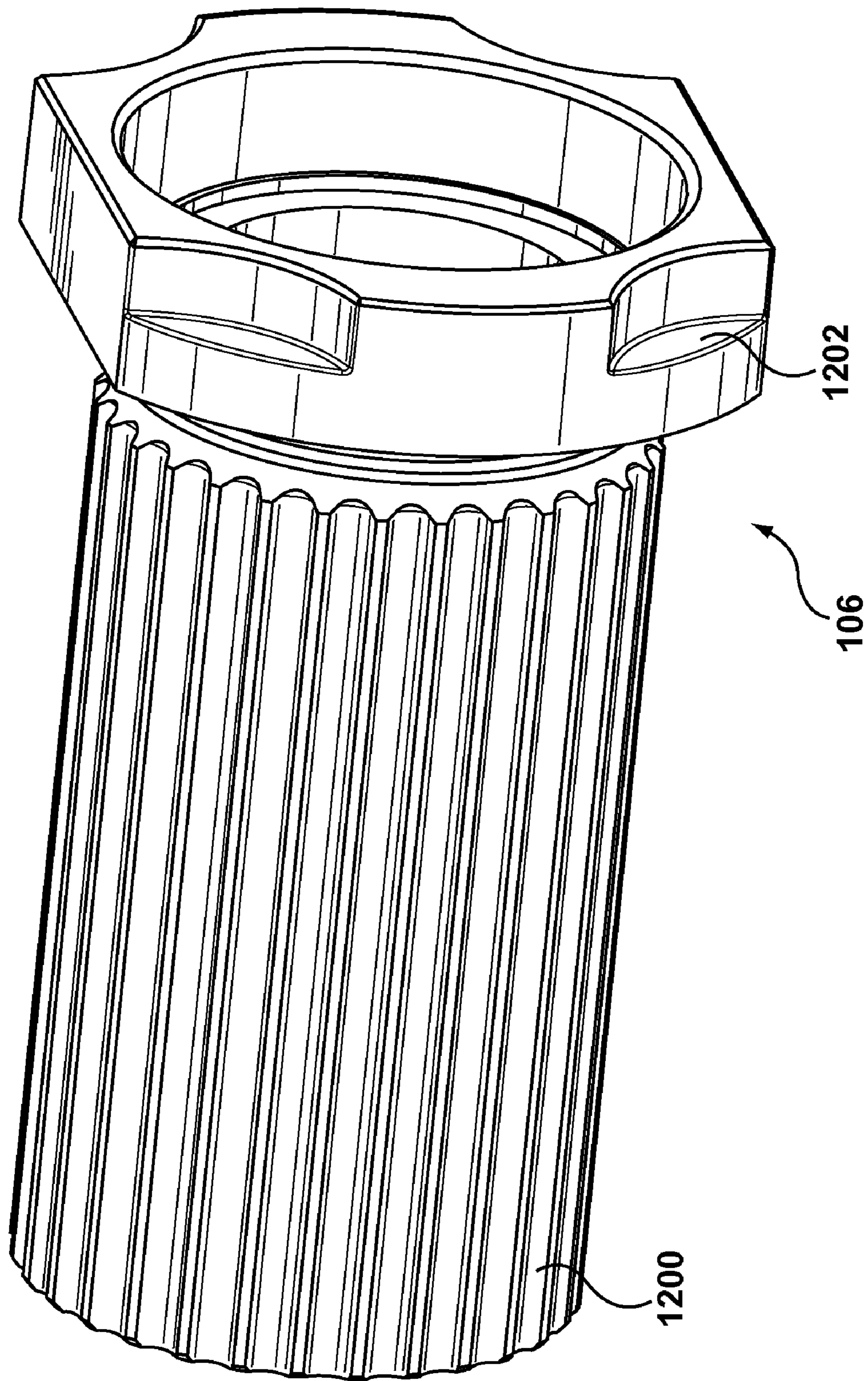


FIG. 10

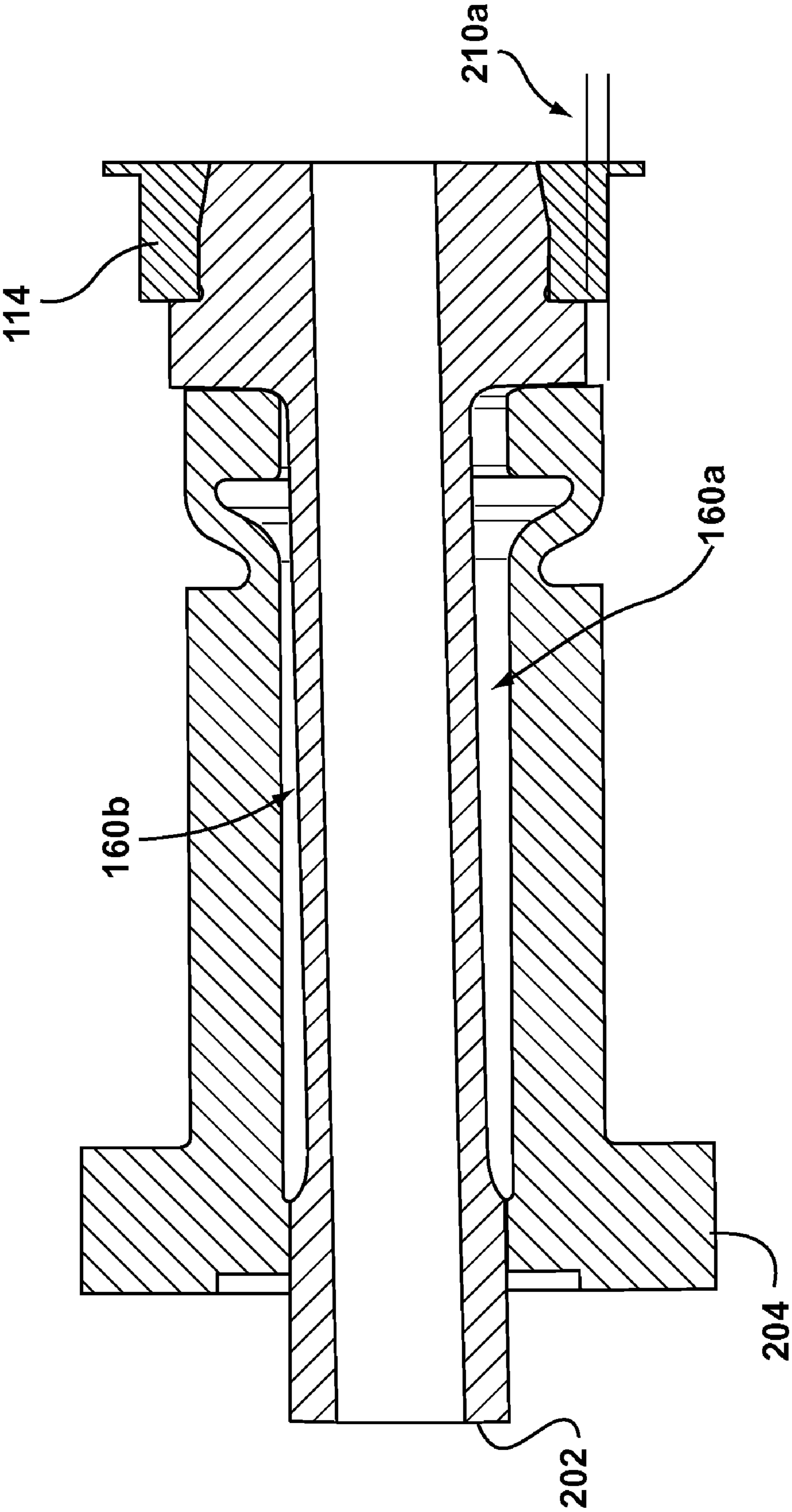


FIG. 11

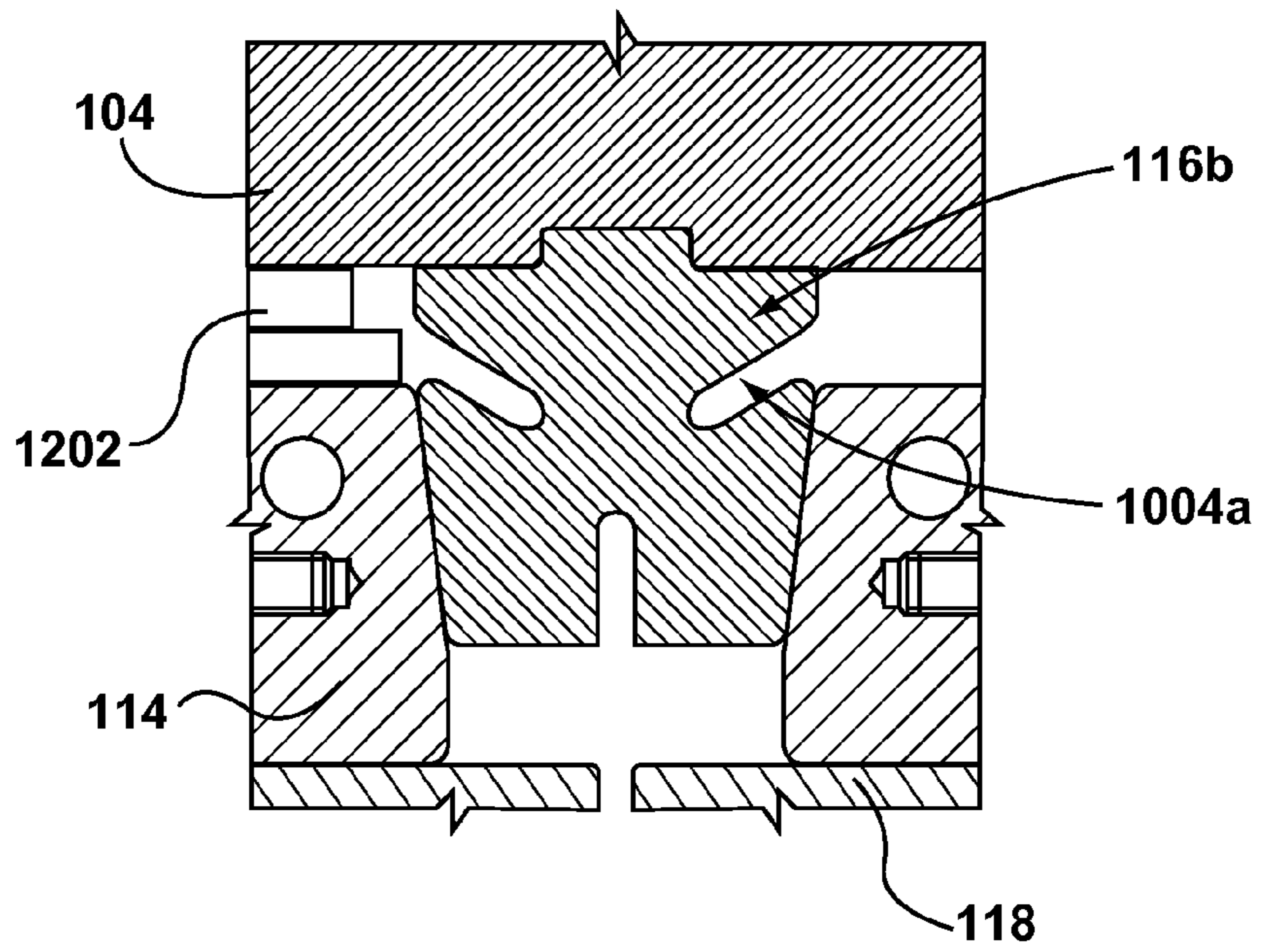


FIG. 12

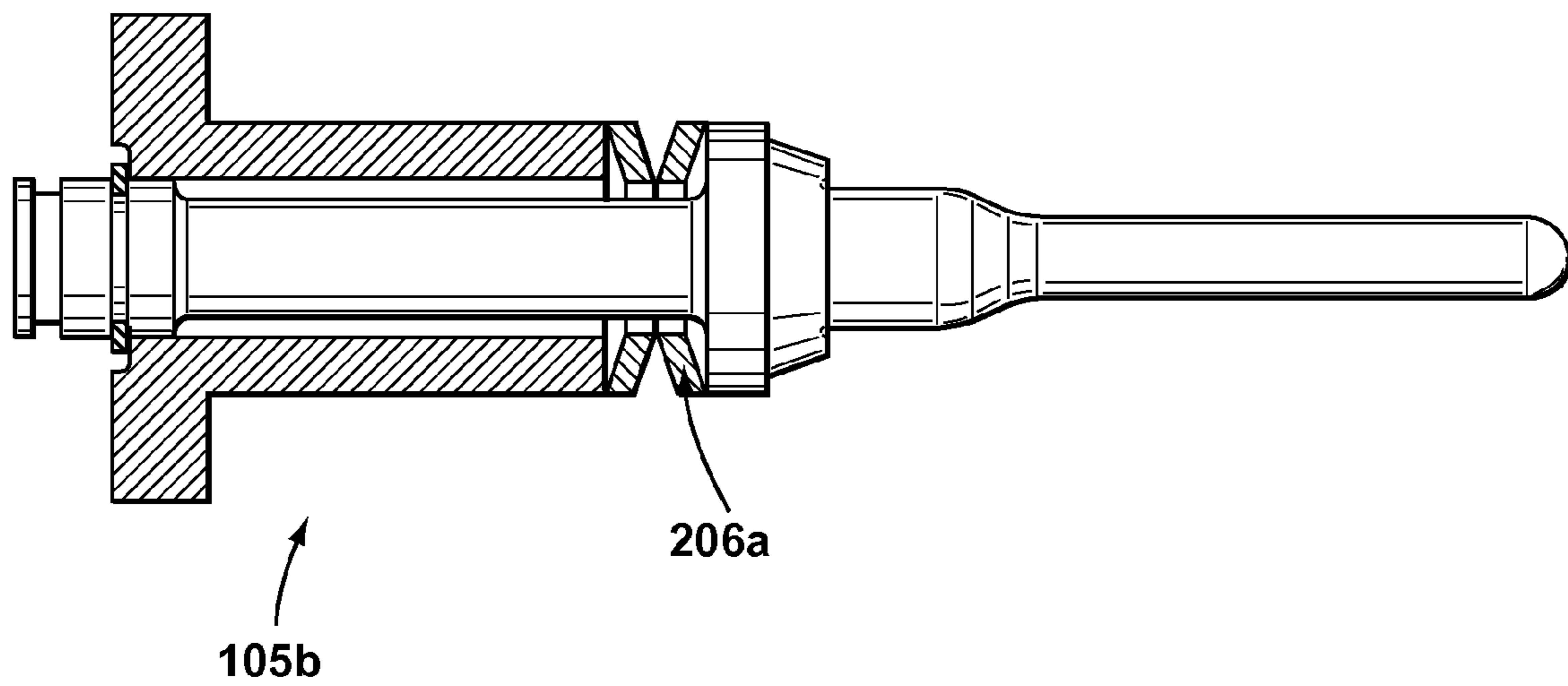


FIG. 13

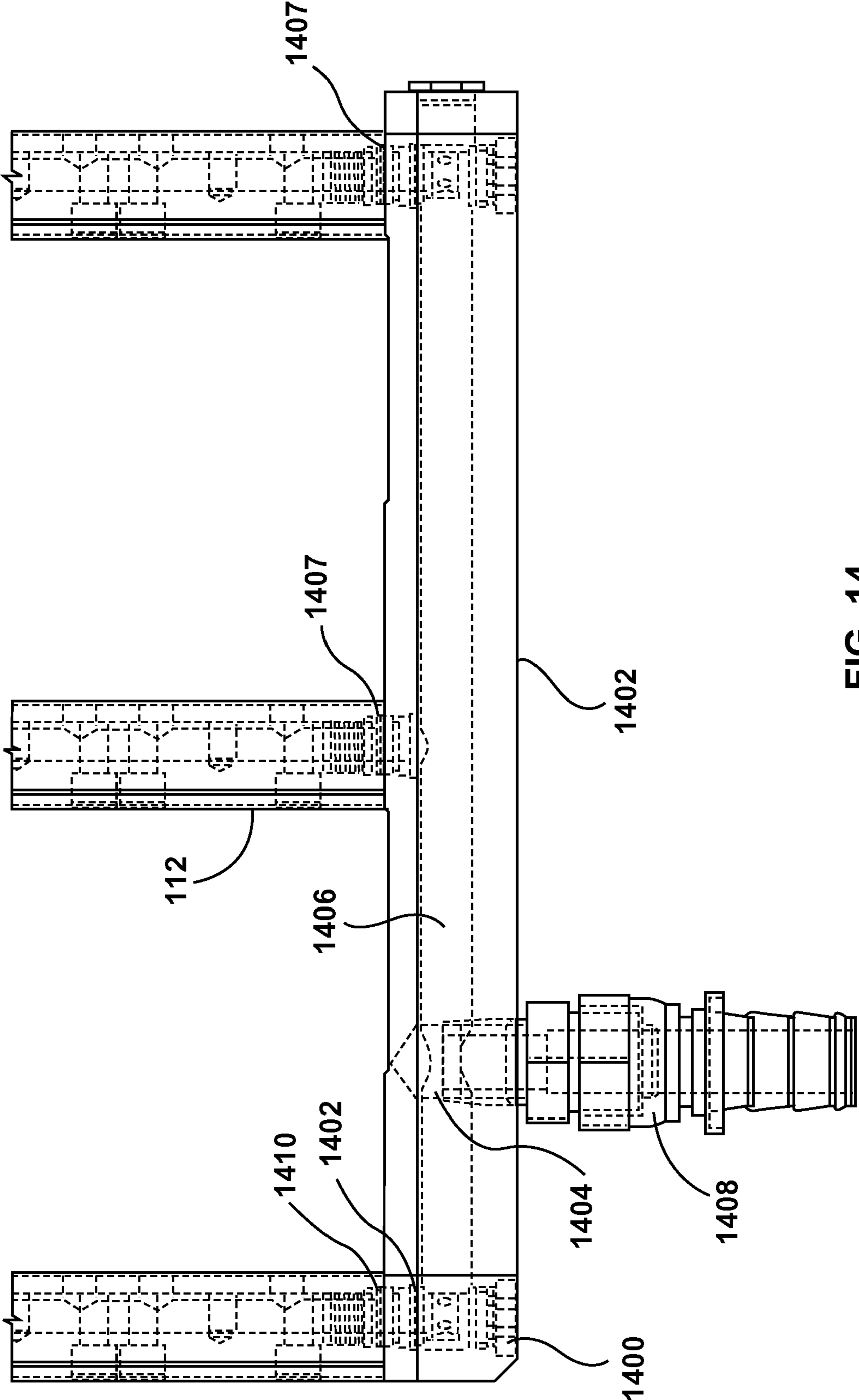


FIG. 14

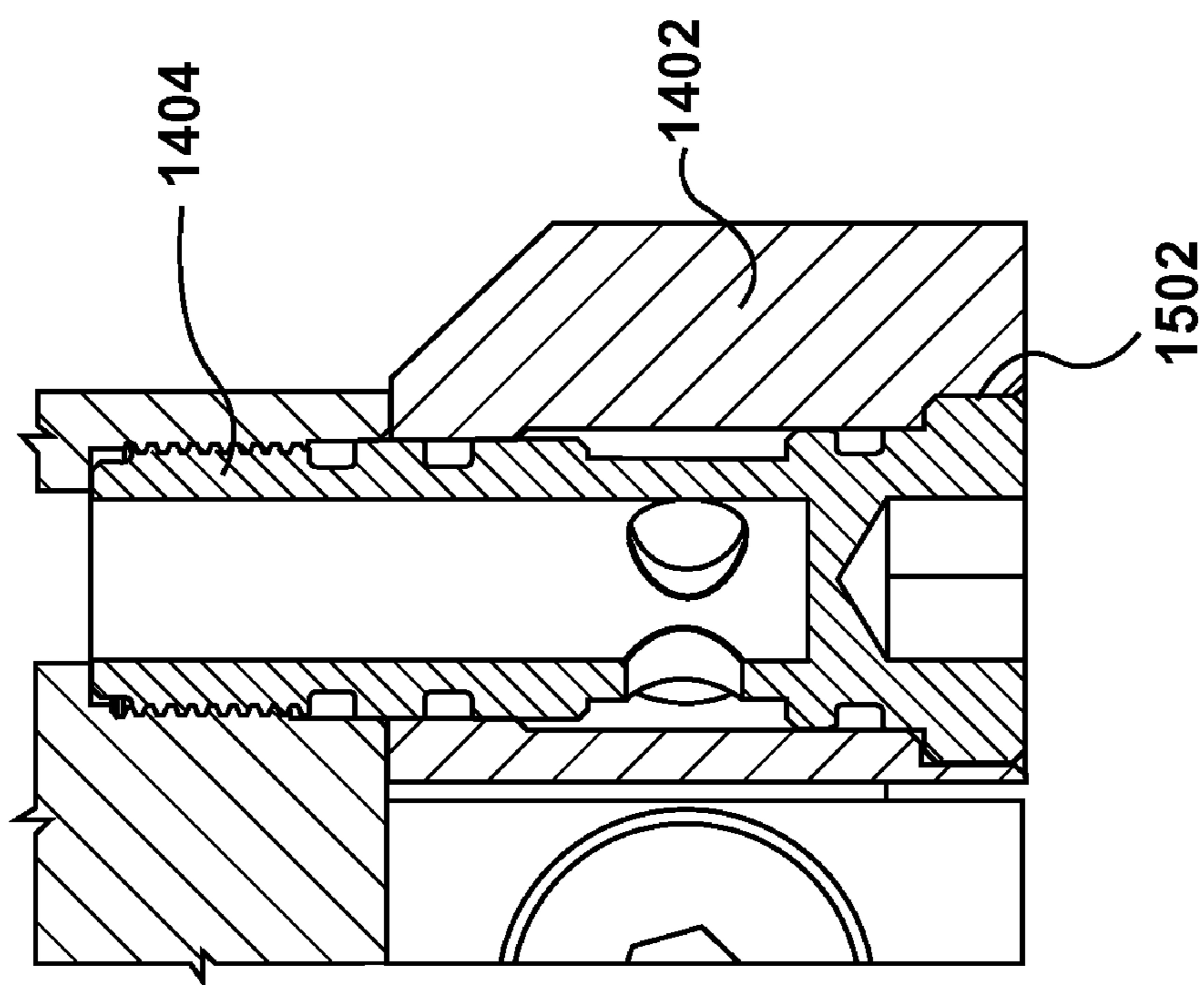


FIG. 15

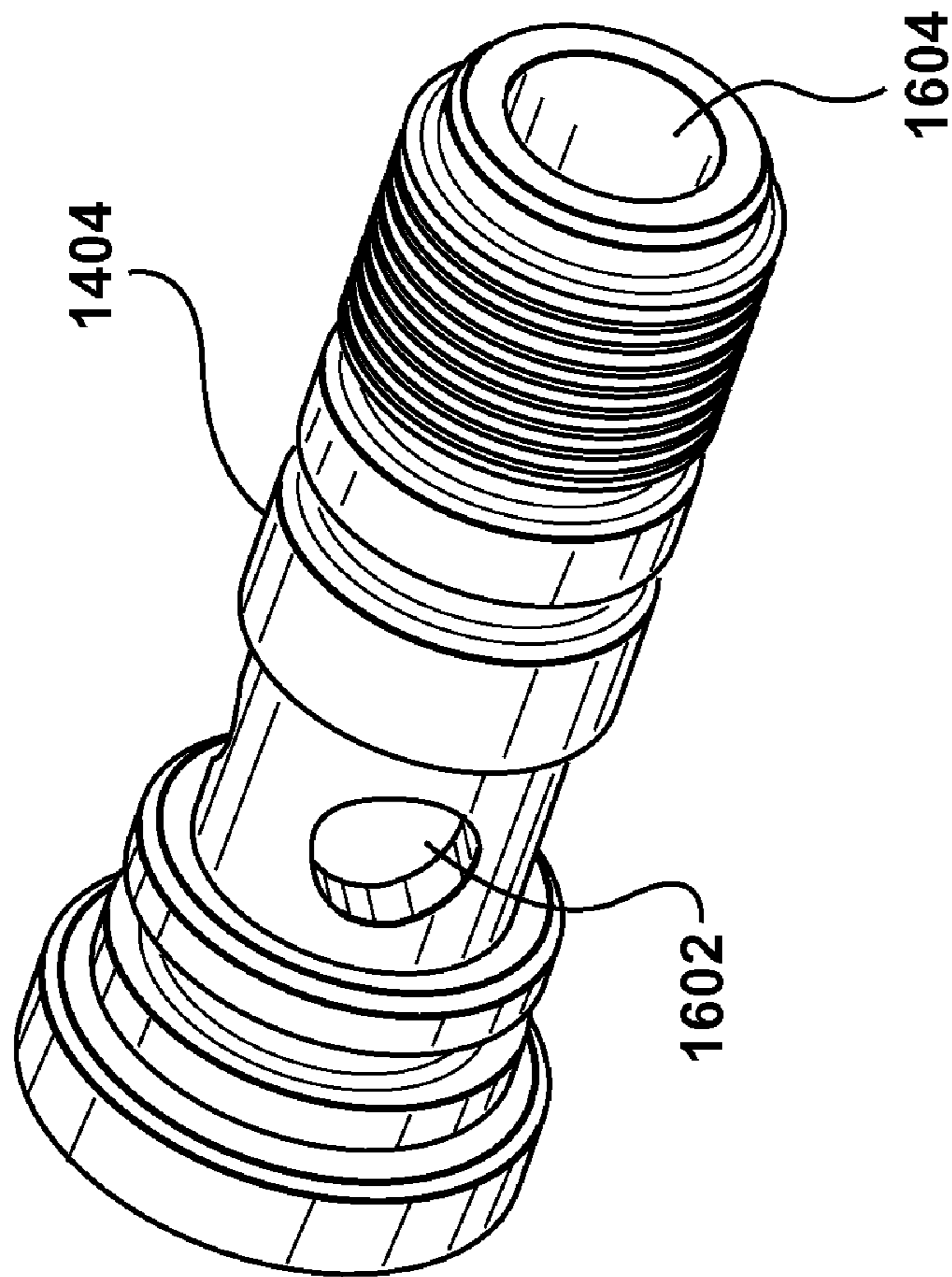


FIG. 16

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COMPENSATING RETAINING MEMBER FOR USE WITH A MOLDING SYSTEM

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to, but is not limited to, molding systems, and more specifically the present invention relates to, but is not limited to, a compensating retaining member for use with a molding system and the molding system incorporating same.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Molding is a process by virtue of which a molded article can be formed from molding material by using a molding system. Various molded articles can be formed by using the molding process, such as an injection molding process. One example of a molded article that can be formed, for example, from polyethylene terephthalate (PET) material is a preform that is capable of being subsequently blown into a beverage container, such as, a bottle and the like.

A typical molding system includes an injection unit, a clamp assembly and a mold assembly. The injection unit can be of a reciprocating screw type or of a two-stage type. The clamp assembly includes inter alia a frame, a movable platen, a fixed platen and an actuator for moving the movable platen and to apply tonnage to the mold assembly arranged between the platens. The mold assembly includes inter alia a cold half and a hot half. The hot half is usually associated with one or more cavities (and, hence, also sometimes referred to by those of skill in the art as a "cavity half"), while the cold half is usually associated with one or more cores (and, hence, also sometimes referred to by those of skill in the art as a "core half"). The one or more cavities together with one or more cores define, in use, one or more molding cavities. The hot half can also be associated with a melt distribution system (also referred to sometimes by those of skill in the art as a "hot runner") for melt distribution. The mold assembly can be associated with a number of additional components, such as neck rings, neck ring slides, ejector structures, wear pads, etc.

As an illustration, injection molding of PET material involves heating the PET material (ex. PET pellets, PEN powder, PLA, etc.) to a homogeneous molten state and injecting, under pressure, the so-melted PET material into the one or more molding cavities defined, at least in part, by the aforementioned one or more cavities and one or more cores mounted respectively on a cavity plate and a core plate of the mold assembly. The cavity plate and the core plate are urged together and are held together by clamp force, the clamp force being sufficient enough to keep the cavity and the core pieces together against the pressure of the injected PET material. The molding cavity has a shape that substantially corresponds to a final cold-state shape of the molded article to be molded. The so-injected PET material is then cooled to a temperature sufficient to enable ejection of the so-formed molded article from the mold. When cooled, the molded article shrinks inside of the molding cavity and, as such, when the cavity and core plates are urged apart, the molded article tends to remain associated with the core. Accordingly, by urging the core plate away from the cavity plate, the molded article can be demolded, i.e. ejected from the core piece. Ejection structures

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are known to assist in removing the molded articles from the core halves. Examples of the ejection structures include stripper plates, ejector pins, etc.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to a first broad aspect of the present invention, there is provided a retaining structure for use in a molding system, the retaining structure configured to cooperate with a slide that is configured to receive, in use, a split mold insert coupled to the slide. The retaining structure comprises a body defining a relief element configured to provide a degree of flexibility to the body.

According to a second broad aspect of the present invention, there is provided a cavity plate for accepting, in use, at least one cavity insert, the cavity plate for use in a molding system that includes at least one slide for accepting at least one split mold insert. The cavity plate comprises a retaining structure for cooperating with the at least one slide for positioning and locking, in use, thereof; the retaining structure comprising: a body defining a relief element configured to provide a degree of flexibility to the body.

According to another broad aspect of the present invention, there is provided a cavity plate for accepting, in use, at least one cavity insert, the cavity plate for use in a molding system that includes at least one slide for accepting at least one split mold insert. The cavity plate comprises a first positioning interface defined on a face of the cavity plate, the first positioning interface complementary to a second positioning interface associated with a retaining structure, the first positioning interface configured to position the retaining structure relative to the cavity plate.

These and other aspects and features of embodiments of the present invention will now become apparent to those skilled in the art upon review of the following description of specific non-limiting embodiments of the invention in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A better understanding of the embodiments of the present invention (including alternatives and/or variations thereof) may be obtained with reference to the detailed description of the exemplary embodiments along with the following drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a cross-section view of a portion of a mold stack according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a cross-section view of a core insert of the mold stack of FIG. 1, according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a cross-section view of a core insert according to another non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the core insert of FIG. 3.

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of another embodiment of the core insert of FIG. 1.

FIG. 6 is a cross-section view of the core insert of FIG. 5.

FIG. 7 is a cross-section view of a cavity insert, a cavity plate and a gate insert of the mold stack of FIG. 1, according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 8 is a perspective view of a cavity plate of the mold stack of FIG. 1 with a plurality of retaining structures disposed thereupon, according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of the retaining structure of FIG. 8.

FIG. 10 is a perspective view of the cavity insert of FIG. 7.

FIG. 11 is a cross-section view of a portion of the mold stack of FIG. 1, in a mold closed position.

FIG. 12 is a cross-section view depicting a portion of the mold stack of FIG. 1, with a retaining member implemented according to an alternative non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 13 is a cross-section view of a core insert with a compensator implemented according to another non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 14 is a schematic view of a manifold and slides of the mold stack of FIG. 1, according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 15 is a partial section view of a compensating coupling of FIG. 14, according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 16 is a perspective view of the compensating coupling of FIG. 15, according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention.

The drawings are not necessarily to scale and are may be illustrated by phantom lines, diagrammatic representations and fragmentary views. In certain instances, details that are not necessary for an understanding of the exemplary embodiments or that render other details difficult to perceive may have been omitted.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

Inventors have appreciated that there exists a premature wear problem associated with various components of a known injection molding system. The premature wear problem can be broadly categorized, depending on severity and/or location of the problem, as fretting, galling or hobbing. Inventors believe that the premature wear problem(s) is(are) attributable, at least in part, to some or all of the following issues: (a) excessive clamping force, (b) insufficient clamping force, (c) process parameters of filling the molding cavity with the melt, (d) geometry of the mold stack components, (e) platen parallelism (or lack thereof), (f) number of cavities in a given size of a cavity plate, (g) material used for various mold stack components (ex. tapers, etc.) and (i) relative position of various mating mold stack components (ex. mis-alignment of individual mating mold stack components). Naturally, the premature wear problem can be attributable to other known or to be appreciated issues.

Inventors have further appreciated that in a mold stack of a given size, clamping force is not distributed equally along a cross-section of the mold stack that traverses an operational axis of a molding system. Some areas of the cross-section experience higher clamping force, while other area of the cross-section experience lower clamping force.

With reference to FIG. 1, there is depicted a portion of a mold stack 100 according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention. The mold stack 100 comprises a stripper plate 102 and a cavity plate 104. Even though not shown in FIG. 1, the mold stack 100 further comprises a core plate, which abuts the stripper plate 102 at a rear extremity thereof vis-à-vis the cavity plate 104. There is also provided a core insert 105, which is associated with a core plate (not depicted) and is positioned, in use, through aperture(s) in the stripper plate 102. Associated with the cavity plate 104 are a cavity insert 106 and a gate insert 108. Coupled to the stripper plate 102 and disposed intermediate the stripper plate 102 and the cavity plate 104, is a split mold insert assembly 110. The split mold insert assembly 110 can comprise a plurality of slides 112, only two of which are depicted in FIG. 1. Coupled to each of the pair of slides 112 is a split mold insert 114, also referred to by those of skill in the art as a “neck ring”. Two

split mold inserts 114 form a split mold insert pair. The function of the split mold inserts 114 is well known to those of skill in the art and, as such, need not be discussed here at any length. In the specific non-limiting embodiment of FIG. 1, the split mold insert 114 is coupled to the slide 112 in a so-called “front-face coupling arrangement”, which is more particularly described in a patent application bearing a application Ser. No. 11/740,564 filed with the United States Patent Office on Apr. 26, 2007 and assigned to Assignee of the present patent application, content of which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. However, in alternative embodiments of the present invention, the split mold insert 114 can be coupled to the slide 112 in other known arrangement, such as, for example, the typical “top-face coupling arrangement”.

Also depicted in FIG. 1, is a retaining structure 116 coupled to the cavity plate 104. Structure and function of the retaining structure 116 will be explained in greater detail herein below. However, for the time being suffice it to say, that the retaining structure 116 cooperates with a respective one of the pair of slides 112 to position and to retain the respective one of the pair of slides 112 in an operating position.

Further depicted in FIG. 1, is a wear plate 118 coupled to the stripper plate 102, intermediate the stripper plate 102 and the pair of slides 112. The purpose of the wear plate 118 is to prevent substantial damage to the pair of slides 112 and/or the stripper plate 102 during lateral movement of the pair of slides 112 relative to each other. Within alternative non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, the wear plate 118 can be omitted from the architecture of the mold stack 100. This is particularly applicable in those embodiments of the present invention, where an actuator that actuates the lateral movement of the pair of slides 112 provides for lifting of the pair of slides 112 relative to the stripper plate 102. An example of such a solution is disclosed in a PCT patent application PCT/CA2007/000392 filed with Canadian Intellectual Property Office as a Receiving Office for PCT on Mar. 8, 2007, content of which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

Within the non-limiting illustration of FIG. 1, the core insert 105, the cavity insert 106, the gate insert 108 and the two split mold inserts 114 are depicted in a so-called mold closed position. Within the mold closed position, a portion of the core insert 105, a portion of the cavity insert 106, a portion of the gate insert 108 and a portion of each of the two split mold inserts 114 cooperate to define a molding cavity 120. A shape of the molding cavity corresponds to a shape of a molded article 122. Within specific non-limiting embodiment depicted in FIG. 1, the molded article 122 comprises a pre-form that is capable of being subsequently blow-molded into a final-shaped article, such as beverage container. However, it should be expressly understood that the molded article 122 can be of any other shape and/or configuration. Accordingly, it should be clear that teachings of embodiments of present invention apply to a mold stack 100 and a molding system incorporating the mold stack 100 that can be configured to produce different types of molded articles 122, such as, but not limited to, preforms, thin wall containers, closures and the like.

Also provided within FIG. 1, is a first interface 124 defined between the split mold inserts 114 and the cavity insert 106. In the specific embodiment illustrated, the first interface 124 comprises a pair of complementary tapers defined on the split mold inserts 114 and the cavity insert 106. There is also provided a second interface 126 defined between the core insert 105 and the split mold inserts 114. In the specific embodiment illustrated, the second interface 126 comprises a pair of complementary tapers defined on the split mold inserts

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114 and the core insert 105. It should be understood that in alternative non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, the first interface 124 and/or the second interface 126 can be implemented differently and, as such, do not need to necessarily include tapers. The first interface 124 and/or the second interface 126 can be implemented in any alternative shape, such as a cylindrical shape, spherical shape and the like.

With reference to FIG. 2, which depicts in more detail the core insert 105 of the mold stack 100 of FIG. 1, structure of the core insert 105 according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention will now be described in greater detail. The core inserts 105 implemented according to various embodiments of the present invention can be thought of as a “compensating core insert”. The core insert 105 comprises a core base 202 and a core support 204. A portion of the core base 202 (i.e. a “cavity defining portion”) defines a portion of the molding cavity 120. Generally speaking, the purpose of the core support 204 is to support the core base 202, in an operating position, where it is affixed to the core plate (not depicted) in a floating arrangement, as will be described in greater detail herein below. To this extent, the core support 204 cooperates with a portion of the core base 202 (i.e. a “base portion”).

The core support 204 comprises a compensator 206. Generally speaking, the purpose of the compensator 206 is to compensate for mis-alignment potentially present between various parts of the mold stack 100. For example, the compensator 206 may be configured to compensate for height differences in various parts of the mold stack 100 in a direction depicted in FIG. 2 at “F” (or, in other words, axial mis-alignment). Additionally or alternatively, the compensator 206 may be configured to compensate for mis-alignment in a direction depicted in FIG. 2 at “S1” (or, in other words, lateral mis-alignment).

More specifically, in the embodiment depicted in FIG. 2, the compensator 206 comprises a compensating portion 208 and a sliding interface 210. The compensating portion 208 is defined in the core support 204 and in the example being presented herein comprises a conical spring member, which in the cross section depicted in FIG. 2 is generally S-shaped. Generally speaking, the purpose of the compensating portion 208 is to allow a degree of axial flexibility to the core support 204. The degree of axial flexibility allows to compensate for the mis-alignment of the stack components. Accordingly, the dimension of the compensating portion 208 is selected such that to provide the degree of flexibility to the core support 204, while providing operational stability, while in use. For the avoidance of doubt, the term “operational stability” as used herein above and herein below is meant to define an operational state between various components of the mold stack 100 which is suitable for proper operation of the mold stack 100, i.e. injection of melt under pressure of formation of the molded article 122. The sliding interface 210 is a sliding interface defined between the core support 204 and the core base 202. In alternative non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, the compensator 206 can comprise just the compensating portion 208. In yet further non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, the compensator 206 can comprise just the sliding interface 210.

As is best seen in FIG. 1, there is provided a core clearance 160 defined between the core base 202 and the core support 204. The core clearance 160 is configured to provide a degree of float to the core base 202 relative to the core support 204. Accordingly, the dimension of the core clearance 160 is selected such that to provide the degree of float to the core base 202, while providing operational stability, while in use.

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It can be said that a combination of the core clearance 160, the sliding interface 210 and the compensating portion 208 permits the core base 202 to move relative to the core support 204 in a direction depicted in FIG. 2 at “S2” (i.e. axial move) and in a direction depicted in FIG. 2 as “S1” (i.e. lateral move). More specifically, the core clearance 160 and/or the sliding interface 210 allows for the lateral move and the compensating portion 208 allows for the axial move.

In the embodiment depicted in FIG. 2, the core base 202 further comprises a connecting portion 218. The connecting portion 218 can comprise a spigot that cooperates, in use, with a complementary spigot connection associated with the core plate (not depicted). As can be clearly seen in FIG. 2, the connecting portion 218 protrudes beyond a rear extremity of the core support 204. However, in an alternative non-limiting embodiment of the present invention, the connecting portion 218 can be substantially flush with the rear extremity of the core support 204. This is illustrated in FIG. 3, which illustrates another non-limiting embodiment of the core insert 105a. The core insert 105a can be substantially similar to the core insert 105 and, as such, like elements are depicted with like numerals. However, in the embodiment of FIG. 3, the core insert 105a comprises a connecting portion 218a which is substantially flush with the rear extremity of the core support 204. An additional technical effect of this embodiment of the present invention is the additional ability for the core base 202 to shift relative to the core support 204 (and, therefore, relative to the core plate, which is not depicted) in a direction depicted in FIG. 3 at “CS”.

A coupling between the core base 202 and the core support 204 will now be explained in greater detail. With reference to FIG. 4, which depicts a perspective view of the core insert 105a of FIG. 3, there is provided a retaining member 216. In the specific non-limiting embodiment being presented herein, the retaining member 216 comprises a snap ring. A non-limiting example of a snap ring that can be adapted to implement embodiments of the present invention comprises a Seeger circlip ring E 1570 available from Meusburger (<http://www.meusburger.com/>). However, it should be understood that any other suitable type of a releasable fastener can be used.

The core support 204 comprises a retaining step 212 and the core base 202 comprises an undercut 214. The retaining step 212, the undercut 214 and the retaining member 216 cooperate to maintain the core base 202 affixed to the core support 204. More specifically, the core base 202 is installed within the core support 204. The retaining member 216 is then stretched (for example, using a tool or the like) to an open position and pulled over a rear extremity of the core base 202. Once the so-stretched retaining member 216 is positioned substantially close over the undercut 214, the retaining member 216 is allowed to return to a closed position where it is positioned partially within the undercut 214. An outer portion of the retaining member 216 protrudes radially and cooperates with the retaining step 212 to maintain the core based 202 and the core support 204 in this operational configuration.

As is best seen in FIG. 4, there is also provided a sealing member 402, such as an O-ring and the like, to seal against coolant leaks.

FIG. 5 and FIG. 6 depict another non-limiting embodiment of how a coupling between a core base 202a and a core support 204a can be implemented. Within the embodiment of FIG. 5 and FIG. 6, there is provided a retaining member 502. As is best seen in FIG. 6, the retaining member 502 is implemented as a retaining clip. The retaining member 502 comprises a first end 504 and a second end 506. The first end 504 comprises a plurality of fingers 508 and the second end 506

comprises a plurality of fingers **510**. The core support **204a** comprises a first internal bore **511** and the core base **202a** comprises a second internal bore **513**. The first internal bore **511** comprises a first retaining lip **512** and the second internal bore comprises a second retaining lip **514**. The plurality of fingers **508** and the plurality of fingers **510** are actuatable between (i) a retracted position, where the plurality of fingers **508** and the plurality of fingers **510** can be inserted, respectively, into the first internal bore **511** and the second internal bore **513**; and (b) an expanded position, where the plurality of fingers **508** engage the first retaining lip **512** and the plurality of fingers **510** engage the second retaining lip **514**. As is best seen in FIG. 6, there is provided the sliding interface **210** and an internal clearance **620**, which allow for a degree of movement of the core base **202a** relative to the core support **204a**.

It should be understood that FIGS. 2-6 depict just a few possible implementations for the core base **202**, **202a** and the core support **204**, **204a**. It should be further understood that numerous alternative implementations are possible. For example, a shape of the compensating portion **208** is not particularly limited. Even though FIGS. 2-6 depict the compensating portion **208** as having a "S-shaped" configuration in the cross-section of FIGS. 2-6, in alternative embodiments of the present invention, the compensating portion **208** can have other shapes, such as, for example, "Z-shape" and the like. Generally speaking, the compensating portion **208** can be implemented in any suitable form factor that allows a degree of resiliency.

It should also be understood that the precise location of the compensating portion **208** along a length of the core support **204** is not particularly limited. For example, as can be seen by comparing the core support **204a** of FIG. 5 with the core support **204** of FIG. 2 or FIG. 3, the position of a compensating portion **208a** is much closer to a rear extremity of the core support **204a** than the position of the compensating portion **208** of the core support **204**. Other alternatives are, of course, possible.

In yet further non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, the compensator **206** can be implemented differently. For example, the compensator **206** can be implemented as a spring connection between the core base **202** and the core support **204**. A non-limiting example of such an implementation is depicted in FIG. 13. FIG. 13 depicts a core insert **105b** implemented according to an alternative non-limiting embodiment of the present invention. More specifically, the core insert **105b** comprises a compensator **206a**, which in this embodiment is implemented as a spring connection. An example of structure that can be used to implement these embodiments comprises a disk spring and the like. It should be noted that the placement and/or the structure of the spring connection can be implemented differently.

With reference to FIG. 7, a portion the cavity plate **104**, the cavity insert **106** and the gate insert **108** of FIG. 1, according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention, are depicted. The cavity insert **106** implemented according to embodiments of the present invention can be thought of as a "compensating cavity insert". Similarly, the gate insert **108** implemented according to embodiments of the present invention can be thought of as a "compensating gate insert".

To this extent, there is provided a cavity clearance **702** defined between the cavity insert **106** and the cavity plate **104**. The cavity clearance **702** provides for a degree of movement of the cavity insert **106** within the cavity plate **104**. Accordingly, the dimension of the cavity clearance **702** is selected such that to provide the degree of movement to the cavity insert **106**, while providing operational stability, while in use. In the non-limiting embodiment of FIG. 7, the cavity insert

106 is coupled to the cavity plate **104** by means of first flexible fasteners **704**. Generally speaking, the first flexible fasteners **704** can be implemented by any suitable means that secures the cavity insert **106** to the cavity plate **104**, while allowing a degree of movement to the cavity insert **106** vis-à-vis the cavity plate **104**. An example of the structure suitable for implementing the first flexible fasteners **704** is a two-piece shoulder screw. An example of such two-piece shoulder screw can be implemented as a socket head shoulder screw available from SPS Technologies, Unbrako Engineered Fasteners (<http://www.unbrako.com.au/>). However, in alternative non-limiting embodiments other types of fasteners can be used, such as, for example, standard shoulder screws and the like.

With brief reference to FIG. 10, which depicts a perspective view of the cavity insert **106**, the cavity insert **106** comprises a plurality of cooling channels **1200**. The function of the plurality of cooling channels **1200** is generally known and can be broadly categorized as supplying coolant (such as water or another suitable coolant medium) to provide for cooling of the cavity insert **106** during specific portions of a molding cycle. In the specific non-limiting embodiment depicted in FIG. 10, the cooling channels **1200** comprise a plurality of elongated grooves extending substantially along an outer periphery of the cavity insert **106** in a direction of the operational axis of the mold stack **100**. In some embodiments of the present invention, the plurality of cooling channels **1200** can be produced by using a rolling machine. However, a plethora of alternative tools can be used for producing the cooling channels **1200**, such as, but not limited to, milling tools, machining tools, as well as various erosion techniques. In alternative non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, other configurations of the cooling channels **1200** can be used, such as, but not limited to a spiral configuration and the like. Also depicted in FIG. 10 is a plurality of coupling interfaces **1202** configured to accept, in use, the aforementioned first flexible fasteners **704**.

With continued reference to FIG. 7, the cavity insert **106** comprises a step **720**. The step **720** is configured to accept, in use a lip **722** of the gate insert **108**. Accordingly, it can be said that an interface **724** defined between the cavity insert **106** and the gate insert **108** comprises a first contact surface **726** and a second contact surface **728**, the first contact surface **726** and the second contact surface **728** being disposed in different planes and separated by a traversing third contact surface **730**. However, in alternative non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, the interface **724** can be implemented differently, for an example, as a single contact surface (not depicted) known to those of skill in the art.

There is also provided a gate insert clearance **706** defined between the gate insert **108** and the cavity plate **104**. The gate insert clearance **706** provides for a degree of movement of the gate insert **108** within the cavity plate **104**. Accordingly, the dimension of the gate insert **108** is selected such that to provide the degree of movement, while providing operational stability, while in use. In the non-limiting embodiment of FIG. 7, the gate insert **108** is coupled to the cavity plate **104** by means of second flexible fasteners **708**. Generally speaking, the second flexible fasteners **708** can be implemented by any suitable means that secures the gate insert **108** to the cavity plate **104**, while allowing a degree of movement to the gate insert **108** vis-à-vis the cavity plate **104**. An example of the structure suitable for implementing the second flexible fasteners **708** is a two-piece shoulder screw. An example of such two-piece shoulder screw can be implemented as a socket head shoulder screw available from SPS Technologies, Unbrako Engineered Fasteners (<http://www.unbrako.co->

m.au/). However, in alternative non-limiting embodiments other types of fasteners can be used, such as, for example, standard shoulder screws and the like.

Also depicted in FIG. 7 is a first sealing member 710 and a second sealing member 712. The first sealing member 710 is positioned in an annular groove 714 defined between a front face of a shoulder 716 of the core insert 105 and a rear extremity face of the cavity plate 104. The second sealing member 712 is positioned in an annular groove 717 defined between a front face of a shoulder 718 of the gate insert 108 and a front extremity of the cavity plate 104. An additional technical effect of this placement of the first sealing member 710 and the second sealing member 712 includes ability to provide an effective seal even with larger dimensions of the cavity clearance 702 and/or the gate insert clearance 706. Another technical effect of these embodiments of the present invention may include prevention of a “bounce-back effect” of the cavity insert 106 after being aligned to or, in other words, after movement to a desired position. For the avoidance of doubt, term “bounce-back effect” is meant to denote an effect whereby the cavity insert 106 experiences an urge to move to (or, in other words, “bounce back”) to a position within the cavity plate 104 that it was in prior to be aligned to the desired position. In the specific embodiment of FIG. 7, there is also provided a third sealing member 750 provided between the lip 722 and the step 720.

However, in alternative non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, the first sealing member 710 and/or the second sealing member 712 can be positioned along an outer circumference of the cavity insert 106, as is known in the art.

It is worthwhile noting that FIG. 7 depicts one embodiment of how the compensating cavity insert 106 and the compensating gate insert 108 can be implemented. It should be appreciated that other alternative implementations are possible. One example of alternative implementation is disclosed in a US patent application bearing a serial application Ser. No. 11/741,761 filed on Apr. 29, 2007 and assigned to the Assignee of the present patent application, content of which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

With reference to FIG. 8, a perspective view of the cavity plate 104 according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention is depicted. The cavity plate is associated with a retaining structure 116a. Within specific embodiment of the present invention depicted in FIG. 8, the cavity plate 104 is associated with a plurality of retaining structures 116a. With continued reference to FIG. 8 and with reference to FIG. 9, a non-limiting embodiment of one such retaining structure 116a is depicted. The retaining structure 116a comprises a body 902. Defined in the body 902 is a relief element 904. Generally speaking, the purpose of the relief element 904 is to provide a degree of flexibility to the body 902 of the retaining structure 116a. Accordingly, the dimension of the relief element 904 is selected such that to provide the degree of flexibility to the retaining structure 116a, while providing operational stability, while in use.

Within the specific non-limiting embodiment of FIG. 9, the relief element 904 comprises a groove defined along a length of the body 902. However, in alternative non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, the relief element 904 can be implemented as a groove (or another shape) defined along at least a portion of the length of the body 902.

As will be recalled from the description of FIG. 1, the purpose of the retaining structure 116a is to position and to retain the respective one of the pair of slides 112 in an operating position. Traditionally, structures similar to the retaining structure 116a have been manufactured to tight tolerances using various precise-machining techniques. A technical

effect of embodiments of the present invention may include decreased or no requirement to precise-machine the retaining structure 116a, as the relief element 904 can compensate for imprecision(s) in the dimensions of the body 902.

In the embodiment being described herein, the body 902 comprises a coupling interface 906. The coupling interface 906 can comprise two bores for accepting a pair of suitable fasteners (such as bolts, etc.) therethrough for coupling to the cavity plate 104. It should be appreciated that the number of bores/fasteners used is not particularly limited. Similarly, other structures to implement the coupling interface 906 can be used and are known to those of skill in the art. The body 902 further comprises a first positioning interface 908. The first positioning interface 908 cooperates with a second positioning interface 808 defined on a face of the cavity plate 104, as is best seen in FIG. 8. In the specific non-limiting embodiment depicted herein, the first positioning interface 908 comprises a protruding leg and the second positioning interface 808 comprises a groove, the shape of the groove being complementary to the shape of the protruding leg. The first positioning interface 908 and the second positioning interface 808 are dimensioned in this complementary relationship such that to precisely position the retaining structure 116a vis-à-vis the cavity plate 104 and, more specifically, vis-à-vis a respective pair of slides 112 when the mold stack 100 is in the operating position.

Accordingly, the retaining structure 116a implemented according to embodiments of the present invention can be thought of as a “compensating retaining structure”. As is shown in FIG. 8, there are also provided a plurality of non-compensating retaining structures 810. The plurality of non-compensating retaining structures 810 are located at a periphery of the cavity plate 104 and, more specifically, on opposing ends of the cavity plate 104 relative to the operating axis of the mold stack 100. In alternative non-limiting embodiments, compensating retaining structures similar to the retaining structure 116a can be used instead of the non-compensating retaining structure 810.

It should be noted that the non-limiting embodiment of the relief element 904 depicted in FIG. 8 and FIG. 9 is just one example of possible implementation thereof. Numerous alternative implementations are possible. For example, with reference to FIG. 1, another non-limiting embodiment of the retaining structure 116 is depicted. Within the embodiment of FIG. 1, the retaining structure 116 comprises a body 1002. The body 1002 comprises a relief element 1004. In the specific non-limiting embodiment of FIG. 1, the relief element 1004 comprises three undercuts defined in the body 1002. The body 1002 further comprises a first positioning interface 1008. The cavity plate 104 also comprises a second positioning interface 1010. Similar to the first positioning interface 908 and the second positioning interface 808, the first positioning interface 1008 and the second positioning interface 1010 are dimensioned in a complementary relationship such that to precisely position the retaining structure 116 vis-à-vis the cavity plate 104 and, more specifically, vis-à-vis a respective pair of slides 112 when the mold stack 100 is in the operating position.

It should be noted that the number of, the shape of or location of the undercuts that constitute to the relief element 1004 is not particularly limited. An example of an alternative non-limiting implementation for the relief element 1004 is depicted in FIG. 12. A retaining member 116b of FIG. 12 comprises a relief element 1004a. The relief element 1004a comprises three undercuts, however, the positioning of the three undercuts is different from that of FIG. 1. More specifically, two of the three undercuts of FIG. 12 are positioned at

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a different angle vis-à-vis a perimeter of the retaining member **116b** compared to the three undercuts of the relief element **1004** of FIG. 1. Naturally, other alternative implementations are also possible.

In yet further embodiments of the present invention, the retaining structure **116a** of FIG. 8 can be implemented as a rail extending along the length of the cavity plate **104**. For example, the retaining structures **116a** depicted in FIG. 8 as a retaining structure **116a'**, a retaining structure **116a''**, a retaining structure **116a'''** and a retaining structure **116a''''** can be implemented in a single rail (not depicted). Other alternatives are, of course, also possible.

With reference to FIG. 14, there is depicted a non-limiting embodiment of a compensating coupling **1400** between a water manifold **1402** and the plurality of slides **112**. The manifold **1402** comprises an inlet **1404** for operatively coupling to a coolant supply **1408**. The manifold **1402** further comprises an internal manifold distribution network **1406** coupled to the inlet **1404** and to a plurality of outlets **1407**, each of the plurality of outlets **1407** being associated with a given one of the plurality of slides **112**. Each of the plurality of slides **112** comprises an internal slide distribution network **1410**. The combination of the internal manifold distribution network **1406** and the internal slide distribution network **1410** allows for supply of coolant (such as water and the like) to the plurality of slides **112** and, accordingly, to the plurality of split mold inserts **114**. In the embodiment depicted in FIG. 14, there is also provided the compensating coupling **1400** between each of the plurality of outlets **1407** and each internal slide distribution network **1410**.

With further reference to FIG. 15 and FIG. 16, structure of the compensating coupling **1400** will now be described in greater detail. More specifically, the manifold **1402** comprises a receptacle **1502** for receiving the compensating coupling **1400** therethrough. Dimension of the compensating coupling **1400** is selected relative to the receptacle **1502** such that to permit a degree of movement to the compensating coupling **1400** vis-à-vis the receptacle **1502**. This, in turn, permits a degree of movement to the plurality of slides **112** vis-à-vis the manifold **1402**. The compensating coupling **1400** comprises a coupling inlet **1602** and a coupling outlet **1604**, communicatively coupled by an internal channel (not separately numbered).

Even though within the specific non-limiting embodiment of FIG. 14, the compensating coupling **1400** is implemented as a compensator of the mold stack **100**, this need not be so in every embodiment of the present invention. As such, in alternative non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, a coupling between the manifold **1402** and the plurality of slides **112** can be implemented in any other known manner.

As has been described herein above, the mold stack **100** comprises one or more compensator(s). For example, the mold stack **100** can implement one or more of the following compensators: (a) the compensating core insert **105**, (b) the compensating cavity insert **106**, (c) the compensating gate insert **108**; (d) the compensating retaining structure **116** and (e) the compensating coupling **1400**. Accordingly, it can be said that the mold stack **100** that implements one or more of these compensators can be thought of as a “compensating mold stack”. In some embodiments of the present invention, the compensating mold stack **100** can include one or more of these compensators or variations thereof. In other embodiments of the present invention, the compensating mold stack **100** can include two or more of these compensators of variations thereof. In yet further embodiments, the compensating mold stack **100** can include all of these compensators or

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equivalents thereof. Naturally, the compensating mold stack **100** may have a number of additional compensators.

Given the architecture of the mold stack **100** described above, a process of alignment of various components of the mold stack **100** will now be described in greater detail. In some non-limiting embodiments of the present invention, the split mold inserts **114** are used as a master for alignment of various components of the mold stack **100**. In a specific example, when the mold stack **100** is urged into the operating position (i.e. the mold closed position), the pair of slides **112** cooperates with the pair of retaining structures **116**, **116a** to position the split mold inserts **114**. It will be recalled that the retaining structures **116**, **116a** include a relief element **904**, **1004**, **1004a**. Even though the relief element **904**, **1004**, **1004a** provides for some degree of flexing, the retaining structure **116**, **116a** is rigid enough to provide for positioning of the split mold inserts **114**.

Once the split mold inserts **114** have been positioned, the core insert **105** is positioned vis-à-vis the split mold inserts **114**. Recalling that (i) there exists the second interface **126** between the core insert **105** and the split mold inserts **114**; and (ii) that the core insert **105** can be implemented as a compensating core insert; the core insert **105** aligns its position with the position of the split mold inserts **114**. Similarly, the cavity insert **106** is positioned vis-à-vis the split mold inserts **114**. Recalling that (i) there exists the first interface **124** between the cavity insert **106** and the split mold inserts **114**; and (ii) that the cavity insert **106** can be implemented as a compensating cavity insert; the cavity insert **106** aligns its position with the position of the split mold inserts **114**. Naturally, the precise timing of the positioning of the core insert **105** and positioning of the cavity insert **106** can occur substantially simultaneously or one after another with certain overlap or without certain overlap therebetween.

Recalling that the gate insert **108** can be implemented as a compensating gate insert, the gate insert **108** is also aligned with a positioning of a hot runner nozzle (not depicted). Inventors believe that alignment of the gate insert **108** vis-à-vis the hot runner nozzle will allow for positioning of an orifice (not depicted) of the hot runner nozzle and sufficient seal therebetween.

With reference to FIG. 11, a portion of the mold stack **100** of FIG. 1 is depicted according to a non-limiting embodiment of the present invention. More specifically, the mold stack **100** of FIG. 11 is depicted in the mold-closed position. FIG. 11 is meant to depict one of the technical effects of the mold stack **100** having one or more compensating components. Within this particular illustration, the mold stack **100** is depicted as having the compensating core insert **105** (i.e. the core base **202** and the core support **204**). It can be clearly seen in FIG. 11 that in the mold closed position, the core base **202** has shifted vis-à-vis the core support **204** (and, accordingly, vis-à-vis the core plate, which is not depicted). More specifically, the lateral shift of the core base **202** has resulted in a core clearance **160a** being greater than a core clearance **160b**. It has also results in a lateral shift **210a** associated with the sliding interface **210**.

A technical effect of embodiments of the present invention, amongst others, can include decrease premature wear of various components of the mold stack **100**. Alternatively or additionally, the premature wear may be re-distributed to less expensive components of the mold stack **100**. Another technical effect of embodiments of the present invention can include improved tolerance to force distribution imperfections. Another technical effect of embodiments of the present invention may include decreased costs associated with producing various components of the mold stack **100**. It should

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be expressly understood that various technical effects mentioned herein above need not be realized in their entirety in each and every embodiment of the present invention.

Description of the embodiments of the present inventions provides examples of the present invention, and these examples do not limit the scope of the present invention. It is to be expressly understood that the scope of the present invention is limited by the claims. The concepts described above may be adapted for specific conditions and/or functions, and may be further extended to a variety of other applications that are within the scope of the present invention. Having thus described the embodiments of the present invention, it will be apparent that modifications and enhancements are possible without departing from the concepts as described. Therefore, what is to be protected by way of letters patent are limited only by the scope of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A retaining structure for use in a molding system, the retaining structure configured to cooperate with a slide that is configured to receive, in use, a split mold insert coupled to the slide, the retaining structure comprising:

a body having a relief element configured to provide a degree of flexibility to said body.

2. The retaining structure of claim 1, further comprising a coupling interface for coupling to a cavity plate.

3. The retaining structure of claim 1, further comprising a first positioning interface that is complementary to a second positioning interface defined on a cavity plate for positioning the body relative to the cavity plate.

4. The retaining structure of claim 1, wherein said relief element comprises a groove defined along at least a portion of said body.

5. The retaining structure of claim 1, wherein said relief element comprises at least one undercut defined in said body.

6. The retaining structure of claim 5, wherein said relief element comprises a plurality of undercuts defined in said body.

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7. A cavity plate for accepting, in use, at least one cavity insert, the cavity plate for use in a molding system that includes at least one slide for accepting at least one split mold insert, the cavity plate comprising:

a retaining structure for cooperating with the at least one slide for positioning and locking, in use, thereof; the retaining structure comprising:

a body having a relief element configured to provide a degree of flexibility to said body.

8. The cavity plate of claim 7, wherein the retaining structure further comprises a coupling interface for coupling to the cavity plate.

9. The cavity plate of claim 7, wherein the retaining structure further comprises a first positioning interface that is complementary to a second positioning interface defined on the cavity plate for positioning the body relative to the cavity plate.

10. The cavity plate of claim 7, wherein said relief element comprises a groove defined along at least a portion of said body.

11. The cavity plate of claim 7, wherein said relief element comprises at least one undercut defined in said body.

12. The cavity plate of claim 11, wherein said relief element comprises a plurality of undercuts defined in said body.

13. The cavity plate of claim 7, wherein the cavity plate further comprises a non-compensating retaining structure.

14. The cavity plate of claim 7, wherein said retaining structure spans at least a portion of a length of the cavity plate.

15. The cavity plate of claim 7, wherein said retaining structure spans a substantially whole length of the cavity plate.

16. A mold system incorporating a mold stack that includes the cavity plate of claim 7.

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